

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 26 April 2012 at 5.00 pm  
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs P A Warby (Chairman)  
Councillors Clifton-Brown, Cox, Farmer, Mrs Levack, Redhead and  
Thorndyke

BY INVITATION: Councillor Ray (Portfolio Holder for Performance and Resources)

**38. Substitution**

No substitutions were declared.

**39. Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

**40. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**41. Declarations of Interests**

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

**42. Member Development: Update**

The Working Party considered Report C445 (previously circulated) which sought Members' views on subjects for inclusion in the Member Development Programme 2012/2013, and a review of the Officer Contact Scheme for new Members provided following the Borough Council Elections in 2011.

At the end of February 2012, Members were asked to complete a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) form. By the deadline of 30 March 2012 a total of 18 forms had been completed, a return of 40%. An analysis had been undertaken on how Members assessed themselves against a range of skills, which was detailed in Appendix A, as well as other comments added by Members regarding the provision of training. Additionally, analysis had been carried out of comments received on post-training evaluation forms returned following training sessions offered between September 2011 and April 2012. Furthermore, senior officers had been asked to suggest areas where they felt Members should receive input, either training sessions or briefings during the next year. Requests or suggestions for additional training from course evaluation sheets were attached as Appendix B.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Working Party that since the report had been compiled a further three TNAs had been received making a total of 21 received or 47%. In addition, senior officers had suggested a further possible area for a briefing in connection with the operation of the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

The Working Party held a detailed discussion on the response to the completion of the TNAs, the mode of delivery of training, including exploring the use of e-learning facilities, and the topics to be included within the programme for 2012/2013.

During the discussion it was decided that the programme should not include subjects in respect of Development Control and Licensing and Regulatory, as these would be initiated by the relevant lead officers when required. It was also decided that briefings would be held on the following at the appropriate time:-

- (a) shared services;
- (b) the new social housing reforms, incorporating financial implications;
- (c) localism and community leadership; and
- (d) understanding the organisation, following the restructuring aligned with the shared services agenda.

The Working Party concluded that the initial training programme for 2012/2013 should include the following:-

- (1) local government finance, at an appropriate time to be determined by the Chief Finance Officer but possibly aligned to the budget setting process;
- (2) an update on Overview and Scrutiny, which would be combined with a session on questioning and listening skills;
- (3) the new standards regime;
- (4) Anglia Revenues Partnership;
- (5) emergency planning for Ward Members, which would be provided subsequent to Members being made aware of the relevant documentation;
- (6) handling challenging people and situations;
- (7) influencing and negotiating skills;
- (8) speed reading;
- (9) introduction to Freedom of Information/Data Protection; and
- (10) time management/work life balance.

Following the 2011 Borough Council Elections, the Working Party felt it would be helpful for each new Councillor to be allocated a named officer contact to help them navigate through the organisation in their early days in post. Officers and Members involved in the scheme were asked to complete an evaluation of the success of the scheme, and the amalgamated results of this review were attached at Appendices C and D.

The Working Party held a detailed discussion in which it was concluded that new Members should be given the opportunity to have as much help as possible and, therefore, the officer contact scheme should be offered again following the Borough Council's elections in 2015. It was also considered appropriate that new councillors should be offered a senior councillor 'buddy', but it may be appropriate for the senior councillor 'buddy' to be identified once it was known on which committee(s) the new councillor would be sitting and, therefore, choose a 'buddy' from the same committee. Consideration should also be given as to whether officer 'buddies' should come from sections relevant to the committees a Member sits on.

There were two main budgets which were used to pay for member development activity. A budget of £8,100 was used for the member development programme, including funding externally sourced sessions which were delivered in-house, places on sessions offered by other councils or organisations, the Member Development Charter and other costs. A separate budget of £2,900 paid for attendance at external conferences by individual Members. In addition, there was £1,500 available for travel and subsistence payments. The end of year position of the two main budgets for 2011/2012 were detailed in Appendix E.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Working Party that the total expenditure for conference expenses detailed in Appendix E was incorrect and actually totalled £1,357. Also, some details had been amended from the previous report to take account that actual expenditure had changed from the previous estimate.



**RECOMMENDED:- That**

***Member Development Programme: 2012/2013***

- (1) Member Development Programme: 2012/2013, ie the 10 training dates shown in the Calendar of Meetings for 2012/2013, be commissioned using the training areas as set out in (1) to (10) above, with those areas shown in (a) to (d) above being delivered as appropriate; and***
- (2) Development Control and Licensing and Regulatory training be delivered outside the set programme dates.***

RESOLVED:-

**Member Contact Scheme**

That a new member contact scheme be offered following the next Borough Council elections in 2015, based on that offered in 2011, and that a further report be represented with the details of the new scheme at the appropriate time.

**43. Amendments to the Constitution: Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda**

The Working Party considered Report C446 (previously circulated) which sought approval for an amendment to the Council's Constitution concerning the entitlement for Members of the Council to place items for consideration on the agendas of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained within Part 4 of the Council's Constitution only allowed for Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or 5 non-Members of the Committee, to place items for consideration on the Committee's agenda. This was normal practice in most Councils, and was a reason why Councillor Call for Action was brought in, which allowed any Member of the Council to bring an issue to scrutiny's attention, but under much stricter rules.

From July 2011 the Committee changed its way of working from an annual work programme, with review suggestions made once a year, to a rolling work programme, with reviews added at any time. This change meant that the Committee no longer had the annual work programme setting process, whereby all Members had traditionally been asked to make suggestions for reviews.

The Working Party fully endorsed the recommendation that any Member should be able to place an item on the agenda for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, recognising that it was for the Committee to then decide whether to proceed with the proposed review.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That:-***

- (1) Paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution be replaced with paragraph (2) below, and that the existing Paragraph 8.3 be re-numbered 8.2; and***
- (2) 8.1: Any Member of the Council shall be entitled to give notice to the proper officer that he/she wishes an item relevant to the functions of the Committee to be included on the agenda for the next available meeting of the Committee. On receipt of such a request the proper officer will ensure that it is included on the next available agenda. The request must be made by way of the "suggestion for scrutiny" form available on the Council's website or on request, in order to ensure the Committee has all the information it needs to decide whether to take the issue forward.***

**44. Updating the Contract Procedure Rules**

The Working Party received and noted Report C447 (previously circulated) which provided an update on Procurement Tender Thresholds that had been previously considered by the Working Party and by full Council.

On 9 February 2012, the Democratic Renewal Working Party considered a report which contained proposals to update the Contract Procedure Rules. This paper included a proposal to change the procurement thresholds. Members were uncomfortable with this proposal, and recommended that the then current thresholds were maintained for procurement below £10,000, and that further information should be brought to the next meeting of the Democratic Renewal Working Party. Subsequently, at the meeting of full Council, held on 28 February 2012, the tender thresholds, attached as Appendix A to this report, C447, were approved.

No further changes to the Procurement Tender Thresholds were proposed at this meeting of the Working Party. It was considered appropriate to wait for a clearer picture to be gained across Suffolk regarding the workability of the tender thresholds approved at full Council.

The Procurement Manager informed the Working Party that the Borough Council's Tender Thresholds were to be used by Forest Heath District Council.

In response to a question, the Procurement Manager agreed to inform the Working Party as to whether the Contract Procedure Rules required that the specified number of verbal or written quotations were required from different suppliers.

#### **45. Representation on Outside Bodies: Annual Report**

The Working Party considered Report C448 (previously circulated) which informed of the annual returns received from Members and sought consideration of further actions required for the production of the Annual Report to Council.

The Working Party was disappointed at the amount of returns received and undertook a detailed discussion on ways of improving the system, and various suggestions were put forward. However, there was a general consensus that short reports should be received from representatives of outside bodies, but that these should be made to the appropriate committee, working party or appropriate group. It would be for the relevant support officer, in consultation with the appropriate representative(s), to ensure that the report was produced and presented on an annual basis.



#### ***RECOMMENDED:-***

***That the annual reporting arrangements whereby Members appointed by the Borough Council to outside bodies report to full Council be amended and that those currently required to report to full Council should now annually report to an appropriate Group, such as a Committee or Working Party.***

#### **46. Members' Attendance Statistics: 2011/2012**

The Working Party considered Report C449 (previously circulated) which presented the Members' Attendance Statistics for 2011/2012.

Full Council had approved the format and publication requirements associated with Members' Attendance Statistics. The publication of the statistics was accompanied by a list of activities undertaken by the Councillors as recorded in the statistics, and all those activities undertaken by Councillors carrying out their roles, but which were not included in the statistics, these were detailed in Appendix A to the report.

An annual report was presented to the relevant meeting of the Working Party and covered the period 1 April to 31 March each year. However, because elections had been held on 5 May 2011, and there was a significant change in the membership of the Council, the statistics for this reporting year had been compiled for the period from 19 May 2011, the first meeting of the new Council, to 31 March 2012. The statistics were listed in alphabetical order of the name of the Councillor and detailed in Appendix B.

The Working Party recognised the limitations of the attendance statistics, but considered that there was no compelling reason to make significant changes to the current data collection and production process. However, it was considered appropriate that attendance at full Council should be clearly identified and, therefore, the format of the annual report should include additional columns for possible and actual attendance at meetings of full Council.

#### **RESOLVED:-**

**That the format for reporting Members' attendance be amended to include details of attendance at meetings of full Council.**

#### **47. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party confirmed the following meeting dates:-

13 September 2012;  
6 December 2012;  
14 February 2013; and  
2 May 2013.

All dates are Thursdays and meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.40 pm.

**CHAIRMAN**